

## Mayor's Column for September 9, 2009 Review

It is a very sad time for Evansville. We are reminded that life is fragile.

Our community is closely-knit. Every loss diminishes us. Especially difficult is when life is cut short and it has happened too often recently. We gather up our grieving families, friends, and neighbors and give the support, comfort, and understanding that they need to help with the healing process. We must provide the extra compassion and attention that is necessary to help our youth grieve and cope.

One of the special blessings of living in a small town is the opportunity to directly assist others in the community who are struggling and in need. As summer winds down and we begin our busy fall schedules, remember to take the time to connect with your families and neighbors. We are living in very stressful times and uncertainty, fear, and grief can be overwhelming. Someone to listen, a strong shoulder to lean on, or help with a problem—that is the definition of small-town neighborliness. Evansville does this well.

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Among the materials that were distributed to participants of the Evansville Economic Development Summit held in 2008 was a page of excerpts from the book “Live First, Work Second – Getting Inside the Head of the Next Generation”, authored by Rebecca Ryan. Former Chamber of Commerce Promotional Director Bridgit Larsen heard Ms. Ryan speak at a meeting of the Green County Development Corporation and drafted the summary for Summit attendees.

As Wisconsin focuses its attention on our shrinking tax base, the aging of our population, and the “brain drain” of our youth to other states, the ideas discussed in “Live First, Work Second” are extremely relevant. As a Wisconsin community actively at work on economic development planning, it is also relevant to us. In honor of the beginning of a new school year, your mayor is providing this book report.

Rebecca Ryan is a Gen X'er who was named Entrepreneur of the Year by the U.S. Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Through her business, Next Generation Consulting, located in Madison, Wisconsin, she consults with today's leaders about how to engage tomorrow's workers/talent.

In Ms. Ryan's book the differing needs, attitudes, and goals of generational workers are discussed. The “Silent Generation” came of age in the Depression and World War II; safety and security needs formed the attitudes and goals of these workers. The Baby Boomers focused on their sense of community and belonging needs. The Gen X'ers, born between 1961 and 1981, the first generation of latch-key children, exhibit heightened confidence, achievement, independence, and freedom. The newest generation of workers, the Millennials, are global travelers, community service-oriented, and want their employers to mirror their values of community service and commitment to the environment.

The concept of generational differences in workers is not radical or new. I attended a six-hour public management seminar on the topic at UW-Extension in Madison in 2005.

With this background of worker differences, Ryan summarizes four trends that will impact our future. First, there is a shift from an economy of goods to a knowledge economy. Second, demographically there is rapid growth in the older generation and rapid shrinking of the younger population, which means the supply of workers and talent is shrinking. Third, the knowledge economy is global; the world is flat. Fourth, new leadership is needed to navigate the knowledge economy. These trends have also been discussed previously by a variety of researchers.

With generational differences and the above trends as a backdrop, there are a number of considerations for community planning. Most importantly, the next generation picks a place to live before looking for a job. They want communities that reflect their values and lifestyles. In April 2001, Time Magazine reported that at age 32, the next generation will have had nine jobs. Ms. Ryan reports that three out of four Americans under the age of 28 say that a cool community is more important than a good job. She states: "...the next generation is counting on you to build cool communities where they and their families can be engaged and enriched. Jobs alone aren't going to attract them. You need to orchestrate a full-court press of economic and community development that includes educational leadership, environmental sensitivity, and a process for attracting and rewarding sustainable business practices. If you can do that, you stand to leave a legacy—a destination that the next generation chooses to call 'Home.'" Ms. Ryan argues that companies follow workers and talent. Wisconsin must stop the drain of Next Gen'ers as a first step to jump-starting economic development.

What are next generation workers looking for in a community?

- Diversity. Great talent is not restricted by gender, culture, race or other demographic label. The next generation must be included in decision-making; the more young talent is engaged in their community the longer they will stay.
- Third spaces. Home is the first space and work is the second space. Third spaces are local "it" places, like a coffee house, martini bar, or bistro. Third spaces are places where people of all ages and economic background meet.
- Stroll districts. These areas are people-friendly, walkable gathering spots that may include several third spaces. They include retail and eating places and make a significant economic impact on the local economy.
- Vitality. Commitment to the physical environment of the community through focus on green space and sustainable practices like recycling and buying local.

- Communities friendly to start-ups and entrepreneurs. The U.S. Small Business Administration estimates that as many as four out of five new businesses are started by women, X'ers, and minorities.
- Learning. The next generations are life-long learners. A variety of educational opportunities, from vocational courses to hobby classes, lectures, and book clubs, provide enrichment.
- Social Capital. What is the level of citizen engagement in the community?
- Cost of lifestyle. What are housing, food, and transportation costs? Is there a mix of housing options? What are wage opportunities?
- Around Town/After Hours. Cool stuff to do. Connectedness to nearby urban areas. Ms. Ryan reports "Young talent may be perfectly happy to live in smaller communities if they have easy access to...options in bigger metros."

Other food for thought: many Next Gen'ers become nostalgic and return home to raise their families. Also, "...empty-nest Boomers often want the same things in communities: vibrant downtowns, locally owned bars and restaurants, population density and ways to plug into learning," according to Ryan.

As I look at our community, I see projects and programs that are improving our physical/social environment. We have made a great start in revitalizing our downtown. The restoration of Lake Leota enhances recreational activities. The formation of the Inventors and Entrepreneurs Club supports business start-ups and provides networking. There is growing excitement over the community/senior center project, a great third space.

I am especially encouraged that many of our newer businesses are citizens that have moved to Evansville and subsequently decided to make an investment to work and grow a business here. Several of those businesses were started by Next Gen'ers.

There are many additional opportunities for community development in Evansville, but we have made a solid start. Next Gen'er leadership will certainly be involved.

#### ENERGY SAVING TIP

Water heating can account for 14%-25% of the energy consumed in your home. Consider lowering the thermostat setting of your water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit; it is usually adequate for everyday use. Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes.

#### COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

"Just Desserts" recognition of community volunteers will be held on Thursday evening, September 10, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the cafeteria at J.C. McKenna Middle School.

Evansville Community Partnership invites you to attend and celebrate community volunteerism.

On Saturday, September 12, a benefit will be held for Jake Janes at the Holiday Inn Express in Janesville, beginning at 4:30 p.m. Please come out and show Evansville's respect and support for Jake. See you there!

#### COMMUNITY THANKS

Evansville thanks Union Bank & Trust Company for their sponsorship of the Sunday evening Concerts at Lake Leota.